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LOS ANGELES TIMES
26 July 1987

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# PATRIOT GAMES *by Tom Clancy*

*Reviewed by Arend Flick*

In 1984, an obscure Annapolis publisher of mostly maritime reference works brought out its first novel, written by an even more obscure Maryland insurance broker named Tom Clancy. Superficially a naval thriller in the C. S. Forester/Alistair Maclean tradition, "The Hunt for Red October" describes in impressively technical (and sometimes tedious) detail the process by which a defecting Soviet missile submarine eludes its navy and gets safely to a U.S. port. In 2½ years, the book has sold several million copies. Why?

You won't find an answer to this question by consulting the book for signs of the action/adventure story's traditional strengths. Although reasonably well plotted, "Hunt" offers few surprises; and its hero—a 30-ish CIA analyst-naval historian-family man named Jack Ryan, who first notices what the Soviet sub is trying to do—isn't quirky enough to engage our imaginations much. As for dialogue, in which naval officers invariably address their inferiors as "Son" and attempt to calm them before meetings with the President and joint chiefs by reminding them that "everybody in this damned cellar puts his pants on the same way as you"—well, the Dutch could use it to make a pretty fair pair of shoes.

But "Hunt" does have several characteristics, some of them virtues, that I think account for its unexpected success. Clancy's book reached the height of its popularity at the same time as did Lee Iacocca's autobiography. And like "Iacocca," "Hunt" relentlessly reassures us of the superiority of American technology and know-how in a world that sometimes gives us disquietingly contrary signals: diminishing markets for our automobiles, "amphibious" tanks that don't always float, helicopters that don't always fly.

From beginning to end, "Hunt" is the story of the victory of American machines over their Soviet counterparts. (This is also true, if less absolutely so, of Clancy's second novel, "Red Storm Rising," which imagines World War III fought in Europe and the North Atlantic with only conventional weapons. That novel was published by one of the major New York houses.) It's obviously reassuring, too, to be shown a subload of Soviet senior officers so bitter at their government's incompetence and intransigence as to wish to leave their homeland for good.

Yet many espionage and action novels today assert that "our" technology and politics work better than "theirs," so that alone wouldn't explain "Hunt's" popularity. What's most conspicuous about "Hunt" is the sheer depth of research that must have gone into its writing. Clancy, who never served in any branch of the armed forces himself, seems to have absorbed every piece of declassified writing on Soviet and American naval tactics and ship specifications ever written, impressing Defense Department bigwigs, admirals and even the President himself with his knowledge in the process. The result is a novel in which missile boat drive systems, "cavitation" sounds and sonar capabilities assume a position of prominence equal to that of the characters in traditional fiction.

So many of us are intrigued by his fiction, I think, because we enjoy the feeling that these machines (and maybe machines in general) are within our cognitive grasp, under our intellectual control. In any case, we emerge from a reading of Clancy with the satisfaction of having learned some things about modern arms and armies that might otherwise have eluded us.

The reader of Clancy's latest novel, "Patriot Games," will learn a fair amount about international terrorism in general and the Irish Republican Army specifically; in its 540 pages, he will also be instructed in British court procedures, CIA document classification and coding methods and the capability of our government's spy satellites to determine the gender of a person on the ground from 100 miles in space. Not to mention being told how to grill a steak properly and how to have sex safely during pregnancy.

"Patriot Games" is a "prequel" to "Hunt." Its protagonist is again Jack Ryan, and it describes the events leading up to his decision to join the CIA full time. He is a former Marine lieutenant, a Georgetown history Ph.D, an instructor at Annapolis and an occasional consultant to the CIA. While with his family on a research trip/vacation to London, Ryan foils an attempt by an IRA splinter group to kidnap the Prince and Princess of Wales, getting himself shot in the shoulder in the process. It turns out that Ryan had written a report on terrorism for the CIA the previous summer, a coincidence from which the narrative does little to distract us.

After a period of recuperation at a London hospital, during which Ryan is shown implausibly offering counseling to the humiliated prince (who regrets his passivity during the attack), Ryan testifies at the trial of the surviving terrorist, Sean Miller, thereby making him an enemy for life. Upon returning to Annapolis with his wife and small daughter, Ryan attempts to resume his teaching, but finds himself gradually drawn into the anti-terrorist intelligence work that only the CIA can provide for him.

Meanwhile, in Britain, Miller escapes from custody. We follow Miller to a Libyan terrorist camp and later back to Ireland, where he and his colleagues of the "Ulster Liberation Army" develop a plan to strike back at Ryan in such a way as to make it appear the work of their enemies, the IRA itself. The plan nearly succeeds, but its failure leads to a final attempt on Ryan's life and an attack on the prince and princess during their visit to America some months later.

In telling his story, Clancy also wants us to be concerned about the development of Ryan's character: Will he accept the CIA's offer of a permanent job? Will his hatred of the ULA after its attack on his family prove morally debilitating? But Clancy is finally less interested in sustaining tension or developing character than in describing logistics and procedures of all kinds—

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how to set up a "safe house," how illegal arms are moved throughout the world, even how a shock-trauma center works. Like "The Hunt for Red October," "Patriot Games" stands or falls according to how interesting we find the disparate information it offers us.

"Patriot Games" is almost self-consciously didactic. It wants to convince us that terrorists are criminals, pure and simple—that they pose an enormous threat to us (you can't keep writing about the Soviets forever) but that our machines, our know-how and especially our information-gathering abilities are strong enough to thwart their efforts. "It's all a battle for information," thinks Ryan at one point, or as his superior at the CIA puts it, "It's all about intelligence, and intelligence comes down to a bunch of faceless bureaucrats sifting" through papers. In an era of informational overload, when many of us push paper for a living, part of Clancy's appeal must lie in his glorification of the data analyst—as hero and as reader. ■



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